WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A computer-readable storage medium having data structures stored thereon or a computer-readable propagated signal having data structures, the data structures comprising:

an access control group data structure to store access control group data;

a user access data structure to store user access data wherein the user access data relates to at least one entry in the access control group data structure; and

a data object access data structure to store data object access data wherein the data object access data relates to at least one entry in the access control group data structure.

2. The medium or propagated signal of claim 1 wherein at least one entry in the access control group data includes a characteristic for use in determining at least one entry in the user access data structure that relates to the at least one entry in the access control group data structure.

3. The medium or propagated signal of claim 1 wherein at least one entry in the access control group data structure includes a characteristic for use in determining at least one entry in the data object access data structure that relates to the at least one entry in the access control group data structure.

4. The medium or propagated signal of claim 1 wherein at least one entry in the access control group data structure includes:

a user characteristic for use in determining at least one entry in the user access data structure that relates to the at least one entry in the access control group data structure, and

an object characteristic for use in determining at least one entry in the data object access data structure that relates to the at least one entry in the access control group data structure.

5. The medium or propagated signal of claim 1 wherein at least one entry in the access control group data structure includes an indication of an access control rule for use in determining:

at least one entry in the user access data structure that relates to the at least one entry in the access control group data structure, and

at least one entry in the data object data structure that relates to the at least one entry in the access control group data structure.

6. The medium or propagated signal of claim 1 wherein at least one entry in the data object access data structure includes an indication of action that is permitted to be performed on a data object identified in the at least one entry in the data object access data structure.

7. The medium or propagated signal of claim 1 wherein:

at least one entry in the user access data structure includes an indication of action that is permitted to be performed by a user identified in the at least one entry in the user access data structure on a data object identified in the at least one entry in the data object access data structure such that the at least one entry in the data object access data structure relates to the at least one entry in the user access data structure.

8. The medium or propagated signal of claim 1 further comprising an access rule data structure to store access control rule data wherein the access control rule data relates to at least one entry in the access control group data structure.

9. The medium or propagated signal of claim 8 wherein at least one entry in the access rule data structure includes an indication of action that is permitted to be performed for at least one entry in the data object access data structure.

10. The medium or propagated signal of claim 8 wherein at least one entry in the access rule data structure includes an indication of how to determine at least one entry

in the data object access data structure that relates to at least one entry in the access control group data structure.

11. The medium or propagated signal of claim 8 wherein at least one entry in the access rule data structure includes an indication of how to determine at least one entry in the user access data structure that relates to at least one entry in the access control group data structure.

12. The medium or propagated signal of claim 1 wherein each of the access control group data structure, the user access data structure, and the data object access data structure are each separately maintainable from each of the other data structures.

13. The medium or propagated signal of claim 1 wherein each of the user access data structure and the data object access data structure are separately maintainable from the other data structure.

14. The medium or propagated signal of claim 13 wherein a change in the user access data stored in the user access data structure does not necessitate a change in the data object access data stored in the data object access data structure to maintain desired control over access by particular users to particular data objects.

15. The medium or propagated signal of claim 13 wherein a change in the data object access data stored in the data object access data structure does not necessitate a change in the user access data stored in the user access data structure to maintain desired control over access by particular users to particular data objects.

16. A computer-readable storage medium having data structures stored thereon or a computer-readable propagated signal having data structures, the data structures comprising:

an access control rule data structure to store access control rule data; and

a characteristic method data structure to store characteristic method data wherein the characteristic method data relates to at least one entry in the access control rule data structure.

17. The medium or propagated signal of claim 16 further comprising a user data structure to store user data.

18. The medium or propagated signal of claim 17 wherein at least one entry in the characteristic method data structure includes an indication of a method to determine a user characteristic associated with at least one entry in the user data structure.

19. The medium or propagated signal of claim 18 wherein at least one entry in the access control rule data structure includes an indication of a criterion for use in eliminating at least one entry in the data object data structure when using the method to determine a user characteristic.

20. The medium or propagated signal of claim 18 wherein at least one entry in the characteristic method data structure includes an indication of a criterion for use in eliminating at least one entry in the data object data structure when using the method to determine a user characteristic.

21. The medium or propagated signal of claim 16 further comprising a data object data structure to store data object data.

22. The medium or propagated signal of claim 21 wherein at least one entry in the characteristic method data structure includes an indication of a method to determine a data object characteristic associated with at least one entry in the data object data structure.

23. The medium or propagated signal of claim 21 wherein at least one entry in the characteristic method data structure includes an indication of a criterion for use in

eliminating at least one entry in the data object data structure when using the method to determine a data object characteristic.

24. The medium or propagated signal of claim 21 wherein at least one entry in the access control rule data structure includes an indication of a criterion for use in eliminating at least one entry in the data object data structure when using the method to determine a data object characteristic.

25. An apparatus including a computer-readable storage medium having data structures stored thereon, the data structures comprising:

an access control group data structure to store access control group data;

a user access data structure to store user access data wherein the user access data relates to at least one entry in the access control group data structure; and

a data object access data structure to store data object access data wherein the data object access data relates to at least one entry in the access control group data structure.

26. An apparatus including a computer-readable storage medium having data structures stored thereon, the data structures comprising:

an access control rule data structure to store access control rule data; and

a characteristic method data structure to store characteristic method data wherein the characteristic method data relates to at least one entry in the access control rule data structure.